(U) Write Right: Opening the Traffic Fairy's Packages

FROM: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
of the Reporting Board (S12A)
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(U) We return this month to our old friend the Traffic Fairy. Last spring (see link) we dealt with the misapprehension that all information contained in a single piece of traffic is reportable; we now address a related delusion: that all such information must be reported in a single product.

(U) The phrases "in other matters" or "in possibly related matters..." usually indicate the second misunderstanding; an infallible indicator is the egregious "in unrelated activity." If it's unrelated, what business does it have in that product? Just because the Traffic Fairy delivered it at the same time and in the same package does not mean it all belongs in one report.

(C//SI) An intercept of, for instance, a report to a head or a ministry may contain information dealing with a number of separate issues, not all of which may be related, and not all of which should be reported in one product. It may be easier to repeat a list than to separate information by topic, but it does not serve customers well to make them deal with a jumble of items, some of which may not answer their requirements. Find the most significant issue, using your knowledge of the customer's Information Needs ; put it together with all relevant material, including collateral, and leave the rest for either separate reports or your background files. **Don't confuse customers, or waste their time, by including irrelevant material, or by implying or forcing connections where there are none.**

(S//SI) You're also making more work for yourself and for the customer, since different issues must be flagged by different Information Need (IN) indicators and Topic and Area Guide (TAG) tetragraphs, and both of these markers affect product distribution. SID's ultimate -- if distant -- goal is to have the content of the report dictate the distribution automatically, but until that day comes, we must be careful to avoid sending, for instance, a report that deals mainly with agricultural matters to a military customer because the intercept contained a mention of jet aircraft (we didn't make that example up, by the way).

(U) This is particularly important when composing sanitizations, which are supposed to be boiled down to essentials for a particular customer set. No tear-line or sanitized lead should include unnecessary material, as our field representatives and customers keep telling us. We recently found a report that included an "In possibly related matters" statement -- information with a tenuous connection at best -- in the tear-line. Ask yourself what the warfighter or the policy-maker thought of that. Do you want your customer to think you don't know what's important?

(U) So determine whether the "other matters" are related, and then determine their importance, before writing your report. Seek help from your senior reporters or your URS center to develop your

judgment. Don't assume that SIGINT reporting is like one of those competitions wherein chefs are handed a bag of groceries and required to use each ingredient in the resulting dish. Your customers don't want to find, for instance, anchovies in their ice cream.

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